

there is still nothing that inspires me more, nothing that spurs me on more, nothing that fills me more with positive feelings than the power of freedom.

Chancellor Merkel also spoke very graciously of her gratitude, of Germany's gratitude to America. "I know, we Germans know," she said, "how much we owe to you, our American friends." She recalls President Kennedy's trip to Berlin shortly after the construction of the Berlin Wall when he declared his solidarity with the people of Germany with his famous words: "Ich Bin ein Berliner." And she recalled President Reagan's 1987 trip to Berlin when he made a clear and direct appeal to the Soviet Premier for openness with the equally famous words "Tear down this wall."

Freedom has its own imperatives. It demanded that the Berlin Wall come down, and 20 years ago it did. It was a remarkable time. After decades of oppression, which the United States met with a sustained strategy of containment, the world witnessed the relatively peaceful liberation of a continent. But for most of us, the most remarkable moment from those days was the moment we saw one of the most potent symbols of the Communist era, the Berlin Wall, come down, piece by piece. We celebrate this great anniversary with all the free peoples of the world, mindful of those who still yearn for the same freedom Chancellor Merkel dreamed of as a young girl. May they all know the freedom that is the birthright of every man and every woman.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There will be a period of morning business until 3 p.m. with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Connecticut.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, before the Republican leader leaves the floor, let me thank him for his comments about the Berlin Wall, which are very appropriate. I still have on my desk in my office in the Capitol a large piece of stone from the Berlin Wall. I was there a few weeks after the wall came down. It took a long time for it to come down. The symbol of that I look at every single day as a reminder of what all of us knew for so many years; that is, there is something terribly wrong about a system that creates a wall to keep in its people.

So I appreciate the comments on the 20th anniversary, and I think it is appropriate to recognize the great

achievement that occurred 20 years ago when that wall did come down, much to the surprise of many that something like that could ever occur.

Today, Mr. President, I want to speak, if I may, for a couple of minutes and to share some brief thoughts in honor of our veterans on Veterans Day. It is a day, of course, to acknowledge the sacrifice of those who have served and those who have given their lives to secure the very liberty we enjoy as Americans.

Forty-three members of the U.S. military from my home State of Connecticut have made that ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past several years. They are all deeply missed, and today our thoughts are with them and their families and friends. This Veterans Day, we feel an additional sense of loss in the wake of the shocking slaughter at Fort Hood last week. Our anger and bewilderment at this horrific act of violence are matched only by the sadness of the loss of these young, brave men and women. We keep the wounded and the families of the victims in our prayers and our minds.

Mr. President, we are proud to be a nation with an All-Volunteer military. No one comes to your door and tells you that you have been chosen to shoulder the burden of protecting that which we all hold dear. It is a burden welcomed by our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coastguardsmen. If all they did was to raise their hands, we would owe them a profound debt of gratitude. But for those who do volunteer, military service isn't just a patriotic obligation, it is an honor, and it is a way of life.

Our men and women in uniform fulfill their duties with unparalleled skill and pride. They represent the greatest fighting force the world has ever known, but also the finest core of infantrymen, pilots, drivers, mechanics, and logistical support staff you will find anywhere in any enterprise. If you visit with our troops, you meet all kinds of men and women: first generation Americans, those with a long family history of service, members of every race, religion, and, yes, even gays and lesbians serve as well, as we all know. Most of them seem impossibly young to me. All of them are unmistakably proud to be serving the United States of America.

Some of them will come home to a hero's welcome, applauded at the airports and greeted by the warm embrace of children who seem to have grown a foot while their mother or father was overseas. Some will come home with wounds that will require a lifetime of recovery; sometimes they are wounds we cannot see. Some of them will come home to find that the home they once knew is gone, and they will need a tremendous amount of our help and support to get back on their feet. All of them, of course, Mr. President, deserve our gratitude. All of them need our support, and all of them deserve to

know, as they risk their lives, that the benefits they have earned will be there for them when they return.

Although I know we all share a deep appreciation for our men and women in uniform, the sad truth is that some in Washington have in previous years treated veterans' benefits as a line item like any other, subject to the political whims of the annual budget battles we have.

Let's be clear, if we can. Those benefits aren't a gift from a generous Congress. Those benefits are earned by our veterans, earned with sweat and blood and tireless duty. They represent the most sacred of promises, and they are promises we must keep.

That is why I have always fought for funding of veterans' benefits, including the best health care we have to offer, so that when our troops incur medical costs in defense of our Nation, they do not have to pay them out of their own pockets. That is why I have supported the post 9/11 GI bill, so that troops can continue their education, and fought to include military families under the Family and Medical Leave Act, so the burden of caring for a loved one doesn't crush a family who has already sacrificed so much.

We make these commitments to our troops in recognition of the commitment they have made to us. Today is a day to celebrate that commitment and to mark the many sacrifices it entails. Today, we think of young men and women across our Nation, just out of high school in many cases, sitting down with their parents to tell them they have heard the call to serve, pushing through the difficult days of basic training, facing that very first deployment to the battlefield. Today we think of those families they leave behind, as they pray for the safe return of their loved ones.

Today we will all think of those who have come home draped in the flag they have sacrificed their lives to defend, and those whose lives have been forever changed by the injuries they have suffered in defense of our liberties and freedoms. These are our sons and daughters, our fathers and mothers. They are neighbors of ours and friends and colleagues. They are truly our fellow heroes.

Today we thank them for their service, we mark their sacrifice, we take pride in their remarkable courage, and we reaffirm our commitment to keeping the promise we made when they raised their hands and volunteered.

Mr. President, I know I am not alone in my gratitude for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and coastguardsmen. I certainly know I am not alone in my pride in our talented and dedicated military. I hope the troops who are away from home this Veterans Day, those who have returned, and the families who have helped carry their burden, will know they are not alone either. We all stand with them.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Arizona.